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SUBJECT: OLMERT: CONVERGENCE TO BE MAIN THRUST OF MY
GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. In a meeting with CODEL Cochran on April 21, a tired but upbeat Ehud Olmert detailed his "convergence" plan to establish Israel's final borders within four years and begin the relocation of thousands of Israeli settlers. Olmert told the CODEL that he had formed a coalition of 84 Knesset members, all of whom had agreed to support convergence as a prerequisite for joining the government. Calling convergence a "60 to 70 per cent solution" to a lasting peace, the Acting Prime Minister (A/PM) stressed that such an incremental approach to peace would yield greater results than an "all or nothing" strategy. Olmert said he was confident that he could garner sufficient international support for convergence while President Bush, Tony Blair and Angela Merkel are in office. On the April 17 suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, he criticized Hamas' public support for the attack and declared his intention to establish Israel's borders soon rather than wait for Hamas to agree to the Quartet's three conditions. Regarding Iran, Olmert doubted that UN sanctions could prevent Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon. Finally, he praised Egypt for its improved security coordination along the Philadelphi Corridor, and announced his intention to visit Cairo later in the year. End Summary.

2. (C) The CODEL, consisting of Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS), Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT), Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH), RADM John Eishold, Tom Hawkins, Paul Grove, Keith Kennedy, Stewart Holmes, Dr. Mark Keenan, Janice O'Connell, Kay Webber, and the Ambassador met with Olmert, Senior Policy Advisor Dov Weissglas, Foreign Policy Advisor Shalom Tourgeman, Ambassador Yoram Ben-Zeev, Major General Gadi Shamni, and MFA Congressional liaison Iris Sapir at the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor in Jerusalem.

A COALITION OF 84 ACCEPTS CONVERGENCE

3. (C) Wearing an open-collar shirt with no jacket, A/PM Ehud Olmert apologized to the CODEL for his relaxed appearance and explained that he had been in coalition negotiations until 0530 that morning and had just gone home to shower and change before the meeting. The A/PM revealed that he would present his government to Israeli President Moshe Katsav in late April, and claimed that he had built the largest coalition government -- at 84 members -- in the last 30 years. Olmert added that he had included parties on both the left and right in order to position himself in the center of a balanced coalition, and had made acceptance of his convergence plan a prerequisite for joining the government. He told the CODEL that it was the goal of his administration to change the borders of Israel, and that the convergence plan will be the "main thrust" of his new government.

CONVERGENCE: A 60-70 PER CENT SOLUTION

4. (C) According to Olmert, neither he nor his supporters believe that physically separating Israelis from Palestinians will bring about complete peace, but he said that "all or nothing" is the wrong strategy to pursue in the pursuit of peace. Olmert claimed that, after the convergence is completed, 90 per cent of Palestinians will have no contact with Israeli soldiers or undergo searches at Israeli checkpoints, which he called a "huge step" towards a lasting peace. He characterized his convergence plan as a "60 to 70 per cent solution," after which his successors will be able to "do the rest."

A POLITICAL WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

5. (C) When queried about his timeline for executing the convergence plan, Olmert responded that within four years, he intends to have completed all preparations and have begun relocating "tens of thousands" of settlers. Although Olmert

acknowledged that convergence would be more effective if done as part of an agreement with the PA, he refused to define the move as "unilateral" without such an agreement so long as it was coordinated with the United States and the international community. Dov Weissglas interrupted Olmert briefly to emphasize that, following convergence, Israel will want international recognition of the new borders even without an agreement from the Palestinians. Olmert called President Bush the "natural partner" to help him see this plan through, and said that he has an opportunity to build the necessary international support for convergence while Bush, Tony Blair, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel are in office. Olmert said that he will visit Washington on May 23 and offered to share more complete details of his plan with the senators at that time. He advised the CODEL that when he is in Washington, he will call for a more significant USG involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian situation, and cautioned that convergence will be "very costly."

ON HAMAS REACTION TO TEL AVIV BOMBING

16. (C) When asked about the April 17 suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, Olmert answered that he would not be manipulated into reacting and that the Israeli government was "mature enough" to act at a time and place of its choosing. Olmert said he was discouraged by the Hamas reaction to the bombing, the first such attack inside Green-line Israel since Hamas assumed control of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC).

While noting that the GOI has no evidence that Hamas provided direct logistical support for the attack, Olmert asserted that its public support would legitimize and encourage more terrorism. In Olmert's opinion, terrorism will grow to fill the void created by the absence of a political process towards peace. He declared that he will act, rather than wait indefinitely for Hamas to agree to the Quartet's three conditions for peace negotiations to resume.

ON SYRIA AND IRAN

17. (C) When asked why Israel does not put greater pressure on Syria, given that Damascus is the home of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) headquarters, Olmert answered that neither the Syrians nor the PIJ leadership in Damascus "will enjoy immunity. No one in no place should feel that they can act free from accountability. We can touch them and we know how to deal with them...on our own time."

18. (C) Regarding Iran, Olmert commented that while a UN Security Council resolution leading to sanctions might "get the attention" of Iranian President Ahmadinejad, he doubted that Russia and China would support such diplomatic measures.

Even if sanctions proved possible, Olmert expressed concern that the UN process would take so long that it would ultimately be ineffective in preventing Iranian acquisition of a nuclear weapon. He concluded by saying that in his life experience, "when a dictator speaks about wiping out another nation, you had better listen to him." Dov Weissglas interjected that Ahmadinejad is a "psycho" with an apocalyptic worldview.

RELATIONS WITH EGYPT NEVER BETTER

19. (C) Olmert characterized Israel's relations with Egypt as "complex," but said that security coordination between the two states is better than it has ever been. He claimed to have spoken at least six times with Egyptian President Mubarak in the last month alone. Olmert took credit for promoting the creation of a Qualified Industrial Zone (QIZ) for Egyptian textiles, and said that he plans to visit Cairo later this year. He commended the Egyptians for improving their efforts to interdict smuggling along the Philadelphi Corridor, but warned that the threat of terrorism from Sinai is still great. At Olmert's request, Major General Shamni then briefed the CODEL on the recent Hamas nominee for Director General of the Palestinian Interior Ministry, Jamal Abu Samhadana. According to Shamni, Samhadana is the "godfather" of the Gazan terrorist syndicate and has facilitated the movement of personnel and weapons from Sinai into Gaza for years.

110. (U) CODEL Cochran cleared this cable.

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JONES